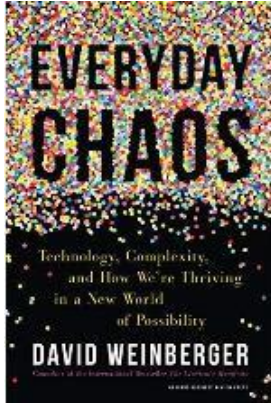


## PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***Everyday Chaos: Technology, Complexity, and How We're Thriving in a New World of Possibility***

Author: **David Weinberger**

Publisher: Harvard Business Review Press

List Price: \$30.00 USD Format: Hardback, 256 pages

Publication Date: 2019

ISBN: 9781633693951

Reviewer: **Sheila Renee Jackson, PMP**

Review Date: October 2019

### Introduction

This is a philosophical work; a book written by a thinker for thinkers. How are we to navigate an increasingly complex world? How useful are the principles and laws we've been told govern our universe? How do we explain events and bring meaning to our lives? *Everyday Chaos* is the author's exploration of such questions, observations, possibilities, and potentials. Along the way he displays his impressive academic credentials and cites extensive literary sources. Each chapter is interwoven with historical anecdotes and thematic insights, and concludes with a "coda", an essay about "how these changes are affecting some of the most basic formations of our understanding."

How will machine learning, artificial intelligence, and technology alter our understanding of ourselves? In his introduction, Weinberger encourages us to embrace our disillusionment. "We are at the beginning of a great leap forward in our powers of understanding and managing the future: rather than always having to wrestle our world down to a size we can predict, control, and feel comfortable with, we are starting to build strategies that take our world's complexity into account."

### Overview of Book's Structure

The book consists of an introduction and seven chapters.

Intro: Everything All at Once

1. The Evolution of Prediction
2. Inexplicable Models
3. Beyond Preparation: Unanticipation
4. Beyond Causality: Interoperability

5. Strategy and Possibility
6. Progress and Creativity
7. Make. More. Meaning.

Weinberger's sense of informational and organizational design is evident in the book's introduction where he explains how the book works, laying out his aim, plan, structure. He also addresses what he calls the book's "oddness", as he concludes chapters with brief essays (codas) that he hopes give some indication of the depth and breadth of change.

Each chapter is progressive, building on one another, in refining essential ideas and introducing new variables. He introduces core philosophical schools and concepts, historic taxonomies, and the presumptions upon which our sources of truth operate. Weinberger walks us through a history of how early cultures explained events and predicted future ones. He traverses Homer, Isaac Newton, scientific theory, existentialism, rationality, post-modernism, and the advent of technology and chaos theory. Each chapter advances that thinking forward, so I suggest not skipping; it's all required reading.

### Highlights

In Weinberger's informationally organized way of thinking he has somehow systematized chaos. The magnitude of Weinberger's insights on multiple topics is near exhaustive. He is conversant in a wide range of disciplines and concisely articulates various schools of thought. In a single chapter, for example, *Beyond Preparation*, Weinberger's narrative includes stories about Henry Ford's model T, the Slack app, Facebook, and *The Guardian*, Yahoo, and Google, among others. Each chapter's coda adds a layer of interest, something else to consider. The book's fourteen-page bibliography forms a basis for further reading.

Some favorite passages:

"We don't use these technologies [machine learning and the internet] because they are huge, connected, and complex. We use them because they work."

"We are thus simultaneously getting better at prediction and are being brought to recognize just how profoundly unpredictable our world is."

"As we become more comfortable accepting that much of what we thought were truths turn out to be shortcuts that let us deal with a world thoroughly beyond our understanding and control, the concepts we use to organize our behavior and ideas are being reframed...We'll ask what the evolution of strategy making – business strategies in particular – reveals about our ideas about the nature of the possible."

"The most important recent movement in philosophical ethics accords with this as well. Virtue ethics notes the problems with deontological and utilitarian approaches

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and instead asks what Aristotle took to be the fundamental question of ethics: What does it mean to live a good life?"

### **Highlights: What I liked!**

Everyday Chaos is immensely enjoyable because the author is so well read. He offers examples and narratives that engage the reader on what otherwise might be dry intellectual conjecturing. So, here is this principle and here is how we might see that played out; oh, and here is another way to think about that.

This is not an easy read. To be clear, the author presumes intellectual acuity and academic familiarity. I interrupted my reading ongoing to look up definitions and review concepts. My book is highlighted and underlined throughout to mark those eureka moments as he pulled concepts together.

### **Who might benefit from the Book?**

This book is ideal for the thinking reader, one who enjoys philosophy, an imaginative exploration of the future and revising one's view of the past. The author presumes an advanced academic knowledge, as evidenced by the nineteen-page end notes and fourteen-page bibliography. Everyday Chaos would be an excellent addition to university course curriculum in a variety of fields of study.

This book is for anyone who enjoys fun facts, puzzles, and trivial pursuit. I learned that while Isaac Newton showed that the gravitational pull of the sun and moon accounted for the rise and fall of the tides around Earth; it's quite possible that he never saw an ocean himself. He offers these surprising observations throughout the book.

### **Conclusion**

Weinberger is a former writer-in-residence at Google's People + AI Research (PAIR) group. For almost five years, he codirected Harvard's Library Innovation Lab where he tried out "in practical ways some of the central ideas in this book." It is this practicality that makes Everyday Chaos so enjoyable. As he discusses esoteric subjects, he makes them applicable to our everyday lives, our Everyday Chaos.

As we consider what the future might look like. Weinberger exhorts us in our limitations and encourages us to relish the wonder, to remain imaginative. Technology is more than a distraction and less than a replacement for humanity. Indeed, while Weinberger's views on philosophical ethics admirably defend the dignity and uniqueness of humanity, he asks provocative questions about morality. What happens when we outsource morality to AI unchecked? What is the meaning of "meaning"? These, among others, are questions integral to living a good life.

As to the future, Weinberger, proposes, "We are at the beginning of a new paradox. We can control more of our future than ever, but our means of doing so reveals the

world as further beyond our understanding than we've let ourselves believe... One way or another, awe opens the *more* of the world"

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For more about this book, go to: <https://everydaychaosbook.com/>

Or <https://store.hbr.org/product/everyday-chaos-technology-complexity-and-how-we-re-thriving-in-a-new-world-of-possibility/10168>

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## About the Reviewer



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**Sheila Jackson**, MBA, PMP, PSM has more than sixteen years of project management experience, in multiple industries and settings. Sheila serves as Senior Program Manager – Lifelong Learning at the national office of the American Heart Association. Sheila has an MBA from the University of North Texas and a BA in Psychology from Baylor University in Waco, Texas.